

Cathy McMorris

7th District State Representative

1998 7th DISTRICT REPORT

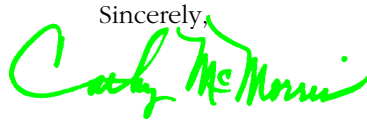
Serving Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane and Stevens counties

Dear Neighbor:

The 1998 legislative session has started and we are again at the task of making those decisions which will affect all of us as citizens. I first want to let you know that I appreciate the opportunity to serve you as your representative in Olympia. The 7th District includes the most active and involved citizens in the state, and the many comments and ideas I receive help me to be a better representative. As this session proceeds I hope that you will continue to make me aware of your views on the matters being decided.

This newsletter includes a brief listing of those measures which are proving to be major issues for 1998. I have also tried to include other state policy information which you may find useful or interesting.

Sincerely,



STATE BUDGET

In the 105-day session of 1997, the Legislature adopted a two-year budget. This year, the legislative session is 60 days, and we have the opportunity to change the existing budget by adopting a "supplemental budget." As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I am in the process of considering changes to the current state budget.

THE FACTS

- The 1997-99 operating budget for state government calls for spending \$19.1 billion (an increase of 7.7 percent from the prior biennium).
- Current tax rates are expected to generate \$19.5 billion.
- Initiative 601 limits spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population increases. For the 1997-99 biennium, I-601 permits a budget of \$19.2 billion.
- Historically, the bigger increases in state spending occur in the supplemental budget.

POLITICS

- The governor has proposed a supplemental budget which increases popular entitlement spending.
- The Initiative 601 limit creates incentive for lawmakers to return surplus revenue to citizens in the form of tax relief.
- There has been talk of modifying the Initiative 601 spending limit law for education, even though education enrollment increases are below the general population increases.

DID YOU KNOW...

The Washington state budget is roughly \$1,739 per citizen; the United States budget is approximately \$6,420 per citizen!

Nearly half of the cost of state government is the salaries of public servants. Almost a third is for grants and subsidies.

State funding per student per school year will average \$4,635, which means that the state provides \$139,050 for a class of 30—and these funds are for operation costs only; buildings costs are funded separately.

The state lottery generates \$58 million in revenue in a fiscal year; K-12 education spending each year is \$4,370 million.

Unlike the federal government, Washington state has a balanced budget amendment in the state constitution.



Olympia office:

P O Box 40600

435 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7988

Home address:

P.O. Box 555
Colville, WA 99114
(509)684-5381

Committees:

Commerce and Labor, chair
Appropriations
Joint Legislative Audit
and Review, chair
Western States Legislative
Forestry Task Force

E-mail address:

mcmorris_ca@leg.wa.gov

Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000



MY THOUGHTS

- A surplus does not mean that government is spending too little, it means that the government is taxing too much!
- Spending a surplus on ongoing entitlements tends to obligate future budgets to the increases adopted in a year of surplus.
- The will of the people to limit the Legislature's ability to increase spending should not be circumvented.
- I would like to see tax relief take the form of a reduction in the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (vehicle tabs). House Bill 1713, one of the 7th District constituent request bills I introduced last year, is still before the Legislature and would reduce the cost of vehicle tabs as well as allocate more revenue for transportation.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT CHANGES

Growth Management Act in Our Area

Recently, several examples of flaws in the statewide Growth Management Act have come to my attention. Two of those flaws prompted me to introduce legislation on behalf of local governments in our region. These examples also demonstrate that despite lip-service to "local control," the GMA seems in practice to be "one-size-fits-all," as determined by the state.

First, Ferry County had a portion of its comprehensive plan struck down by the unelected GMA Hearings Board (as was Spokane County's a year ago). The board scolded Ferry County authorities because the plan did not "restrict economic development" despite Ferry County's unemployment, which is double the state's average. The board also felt that the commissioners did not do enough to "reduce urban sprawl," despite the fact that Ferry County has 41 percent public and 42 percent tribal land.

This interpretation of the law by the board prompted me to introduce legislation this year to allow counties with over 70 percent public/tribal lands to have some leeway in the "rural element" portion of their comprehensive plans. It would seem to make sense that in regions with much public land that the concerns about preservation of undeveloped land is assured, but I will be introducing a bill to make sure that the GMA Hearings Board sees what is obvious to the local elected officials.

Second, it was brought to my attention that although Okanogan County is not required to plan under the GMA, it is still penalized in all state grant programs for not having a plan. I have introduced legislation which eliminates automatic preferences for planning counties.

MAJOR ISSUES OF THE 1998 SESSION

EDUCATION

- Improving our education system to help schools do a better job of teaching students the basic knowledge and skills they need.
- Cutting bureaucratic red tape so that teachers have the freedom to teach and schools have the local control they need to do a better job.
- Directing more of our resources into the classroom.
- Improving the teaching of reading skills in early grades.
- Increasing discipline and improving safety in our schools.
- Adopting additional measures to provide strict accountability for academic results.

WELFARE REFORM

- Ensuring that welfare reforms are implemented properly and continuing to make changes that prevent fraud and abuse.

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TRANSPORTATION

- Reducing the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax and further property tax reforms.
- Making policy changes to reduce excessive costs in transportation administration and management.
- Holding the line on state spending by steadfastly opposing any attempts to undo or weaken the I-601 spending limit adopted by Washington voters.
- SPECIAL NOTE: One option we will not consider is simply raising the gas tax to increase spending on programs that won't reduce traffic congestion or solve other transportation problems that must be addressed.

CRIME

- Taking steps to protect the public from criminals in our communities.
- Doing a better job of managing, monitoring and controlling those offenders who are in group homes or other non-secure facilities.
- Taking strong action against drunk drivers by implementing measures that will better identify those who pose the greatest danger and keep them off the streets



ISSUES WHICH FALL UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE HOUSE COMMERCE AND LABOR COMMITTEE

As the chair of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, I am often asked what kinds of issues we deal with during the legislative session. Here are some examples:

- Labor issues that involve the workers' compensation system, the unemployment insurance system, worker training and education, collective bargaining and employment standards such as wage laws and working conditions.
- Commerce issues, including business regulation, consumer protection and the regulation of professions, except for health-care professions.
- The Committee hears legislative proposals involving regulation and oversight of gambling activity, both tribal and non-tribal, as well as those concerning liquor, the state lottery, and horseracing.

CONSTITUENT REQUEST BILLS

I have been pleased to bring citizen ideas into the legislative process. Some of the bills I introduced in 1997 remain before the Legislature. In addition to these, I have gained a few more ideas over the last interim which I have introduced on behalf of citizens.

- HB 1703 concerning weed control on public land.
- HB 1709 eliminating unneeded state mandates on local school districts.
- HB 1713 giving Eastern Washington more of a voice in the initiative process.
- HB 1716 eliminating the state registry of pistol purchasers.
- HB 1718 ending the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax allocation to the general fund and lowering the charge.
- HB 1719 raising the vehicle accident reporting threshold.
- HB 2670 preventing preferences in state grants for counties not required to plan.

Legislative Information OnLine

I am very pleased by the advent of information technology, because it allows equal opportunities for our rural and remote regions. With the internet, information is readily available regardless of where you live.

Those of you who subscribe to an internet service or who have access to the internet at a local library may find the following "websites" useful for state government and legislative information. I also want to encourage internet users with thoughts, questions or ideas to contact me by e-mail at mcmorris_ca@leg.wa.gov or leave a comment on my webpage.

To find information about the Legislature or legislative proposals: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/>

To view the calendar of legislative hearings: <http://leginfo.leg.wa.gov/wwwcalendar.htm>

To listen to committee hearings, try TV Washington's site: <http://www.tvw.org/>

To search state law, check the Office of the Code Revisor: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/admin/legis/codervsrcodervsr.htm>

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/lbclbc.htm>

An index of webpages for state agencies, boards and commissions: <http://www.wa.gov/state.htm>

For information about elections or ballot measures, the secretary of state is at: <http://www.wa.gov/sec/>

For a searchable phone directory of state employees: <http://dial.wa.gov/>

My Webpage and comment book: <http://www.plix.com/~gov/7thdistrict/index.htm>

Many public agencies offer toll-free numbers for citizens' use. Below are some which you may find useful:

Lawmakers

State Lawmakers Hotline 1-800-562-6000

Federal (US) Lawmakers 1-800-522-6721

Government Agencies and Services:

Attorney General Consumer Protection 1-800-551-4636

Emergency Services 1-800-258-5990

Family and Children Ombudsman

(NOT DSHS) 1-800-571-7321

Social Security 1-800-772-1213

Health Care Authority

Basic Health Plan 1-800-826-2444

Information on State Government 1-800-321-2808

Insurance Commissioner 1-800-562-6900

Long Term Care Ombudsman 1-800-562-6028

Labor and Industries, Dept. Of

Client Relations 1-800-547-8367

Contractor Checking 1-800-647-0982

L&I Fraud Reports 1-800-547-8367

Natural Resources, Dept. Of 1-800-527-3305

Forest Fire Reports 1-800-562-6010

Voter Information 1-800-448-4881

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435 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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